

Feeling Presidential

Author: Dawn Cunningham PHR, SHRM-CP
2021 SAHRMA President



Thank you to everyone who attended the January General Meeting, whether in person or virtually! After a year of preparing for my Presidential year, the first meeting felt a little like my inauguration. I'm not lucky enough to have Lady Gaga sing for me personally, but I am fortunate enough to have seen her in concert several times. So amazing!

As I continue with this Presidential feeling, I remember that In February we celebrate Presidents' Day. This got me thinking about all of our Past SAHRMA Presidents. I have so many of them to thank for helping me build up the courage to take on this role. Whether I was a SAHRMA member or on the SAHRMA Board, I observed and learned from all of the SAHRMA Presidents during that time.

The first SAHRMA President that I remember was Rebecca James, now Rebecca Madere. Maybe the reason she was the first one I remember was because I knew her when she was Becky Heim. We graduated from MacArthur High School together! Small world! Back in the day, when we were on the same two-time State Marching Championship Band and Flag Team (shameless brag), we had no idea that we would end up in the same career field and serving in the same leadership role for our local SHRM chapter. I'm glad that we are still in touch after all these years.

In my early years of being a SAHRMA member, I remember being introduced to Past SAHRMA Presidents Mary Jean Hernandez, Jennifer Rower and Irene Harrington. I was always impressed with their leadership and, as they continued to be active in SAHRMA after their terms ended, I got to know them even more and was able to add them to my growing HR network.

As a board member, I served under the leadership of Niki Belmares, Carlos Escobar, Rhonda Michel and Jeri George. Each year brought an entirely different experience than the next. We all bonded through the various meetings, conferences and extracurricular activities that we shared as a board. Every SAHRMA President has their own style and that keeps things fresh with new ideas year after year.

Some Past Presidents come back to serve on the board in other roles, like Otis "Scotty" Scott who has served as our Diversity and Inclusion Director, Lee Wingert who has been a crucial part of our Symposium planning for many years and Adrian Guardia who currently serves as our College Relations Director.

Then there are those Past Presidents that I have a special place in my heart for, because in SAHRMA, friendships happen!

Jen Swisher and I have worked together twice. We first met when our kids were babies and well, they're not babies anymore! She's the only SAHRMA President that had to assume the Presidency sooner than expected, so her term lasted longer. She also served on the Texas SHRM Council where some Past Presidents graduate to after their SAHRMA term ends.

Jeff Freitag put a huge dose of fun in the SAHRMA BOD! Jeff also made sure that his SAHRMA board had opportunities to network with other Texas and nationwide SHRM chapters. He recognized the

importance of tapping into the SHRM resources available to our chapter. He was proud to show off our chapter and we definitely stood out!

Barbara Jackson wins Most Poised SAHRMA President in my book! Every SARHMA President has their challenges, but nothing ever rattled Barbara. She always knew just what to say and how to say it. She invited the Board into her beautiful home on more than one occasion and was so thoughtful to reach out to me with encouraging words when she heard that I was on the path to SAHRMA Presidency. A class act through and through!

Melanie Sinai trained me in my first SAHRMA Executive Board position as Secretary. I was very nervous about getting it right, but Melanie made it look so easy. Her positive and friendly attitude rubbed off on me and helped me get acquainted with my new role. She applied her enthusiasm to Symposium planning and then the Presidency.

Barbara Bentley is one of the sweetest people you'll ever meet. Besides getting to know her through SAHRMA, I also worked closely with her company and colleagues who are SAHRMA members and frequent sponsors. It's such a blessing when your employer fully supports your professional development and involvement in SAHRMA. Barbara continues to be a very active SAHRMA member and one of our more frequent social media followers.

Tiffany Cox Stacy is the real deal. She is so smart and down to earth and the same time. She took care of SAHRMA while taking care of her newborn son! Kind of a Superwoman there and I was so happy to be a part of her Superboard. She continues to serve as our Secretary, as well as a valuable legal resource providing additional programs for our chapter.

Last but not least, there is Virginia Balfour, who I just learned the Presidential ropes from this past year. Virginia is the OG of SAHRMA. So many members talk about meeting Virginia for the first time and then seeing her year after year at SAHRMA events. My experience was the same. Even when I didn't know who was going to be at a SAHRMA event, I knew Virginia would be there and I would at least know one smiling face! Through the years she has served in many roles from Membership to Treasurer. We've actually served on the Executive board twice together. I have gotten to know Virginia even better this past year as I was her shadow. I learned a lot from her and one thing I know for sure is that she loves SAHRMA! I hope that she will stay involved year after year because we all need at least one smiling face that we know will be there for us!

Check out all the other amazing SAHRMA Presidents that I didn't have the opportunity to know well or serve with at the link below. If you are interested in running for SAHRMA President someday, don't hesitate to ask anyone of us more about it. We'll be happy to tell you what it's like and tell you about the benefits that come with serving SAHRMA! Thank you and Happy Presidents' Day!

<https://sahrma.org/Past-Presidents>